

Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

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C O N F I D E N T I A L MASERU 0687

CAPE TOWN FOR EMBASSY

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, LT
N
SUBJECT: ELECTIONS DISCUSSED IN PARLIAMENT

REF: MASERU 0560,

1. BEGIN SUMMARY. BEGIN UNCLASEIFIED. OPENING OF LESOTHO
PARLIAMENT WAS MARKED BY SPEECHES ON SUBJECT OF EVENTUAL ELECTIONS.
PRIMIN LEABUA JONATHAN SAID IT WAS THE RIGHT OF EVERY CITIZEN TO
DEMAND ELECTIONS AND THAT HE WOULD CALL ELECTIONS WHEN THE PEOPLE
GAVE HIM A OANDATE TO DO SO. SPEAKERS FOR MOST PARTIES CALLED
FOR NATIONAL RECONCILIATION BEFORE ELECTIONS ARE CALLED IN ORDER
TO AVOID RENEWED OUTBREAK OF UNREST AND VILLENCHEM ELECTIONS DO NOT
APPEAR LIKELY IN THE NEAR FUTURE (SEE ALSO COMMENTS PARA 7).
END SUMMARY.

2. LESOTHO'S INTERIM NATIONAL ASSEMBLY CONVENED FOR ITS THIRD
SESSION MARCH 3. SESSION OPENED WITH CEREMONIAL PRESENTATION OF
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NEW SOLID GOLD MACE TO REPLACE ONE GIVEN TO PARLIAMENT BY LESOTHO'S
EUROPEAN COMMUNITY IN 1962. NEW MACE DESIGNED, COMMISSIONED
AND PRESENTED BY PRIMIN LEABUA JONATHAN, BEARS LIKENESS OF LESOTHO
HAT (CROWN) AND OTHER TRADITIONAL SYMBOLS. MACE BECAME SUBJECT OF
LONG HISTORICAL DISCOURSE BY THE SPEAKER FOLLOWED BY SPEECHES
BY PRIMIN JONATHAN AND LEADERS OF PARLIAMENTARY OPPOSITION
PARTIES AND CHEIFS. PRIMIN'S SPEECH LED FROM MACE SYMBOLISM TO

DEFENSE OF LEGITIMARY OF PRESENT PARLIAMENT AND QUESTION OF

ELECTIONS. PRIMIN CONCLUDED HE WOULD CALL FOR ELECTIONS WHEN THE PEOPLE IN TRADITIONAL RURAL MEETINGS (PITSOS), IN THE PRESS AND IN PARLIAMENT GIVE HIM THE MANDATE TO DO SO. SPEECHES ALL IN SESOTHO ACCOMPANIED BY HALTING, PARTIAL AND BARELY AUDIBLE TRANSLATION, DWELT ON QUESTION OF NECESAARY PREPARATIONS FOR, FEASIBILITY AND TIMING OF FUTURE ELACTIONS.

3. BASOTHO LAND CONGRESS PARTY (BCP) SPEAKER (M.G. MOKOROANE) FOLLOWED PRIMIN WITH LENGTHY PERORATION THAT EVOKED LATERNATE JEERS AND APPLAUSE FROM GOVERNMENT BENCHES AND OCCASIONAL APPLAUSE FROM HIS OWN SUPPORTERS. HALTS FOR TRANSLATION WERE PEPPERED THROUGHOUT BY RAUCOUS COMMENTARY FROM GOVERNMENT BENCHES MAKING TRANSLATION ALMOST INAUDIBLE. GIST OF BCP SPEAKER'S COMMENTS WAS RENEWED CALL FOR BNP GOVERNMENT TO SEEK RECONCILIATION WITH BCP LEADERSHIP IN EXILE AS A NECESSARY STEP TOWARD ELECTIONS. ACCORDING TO GOVT NEWSPAPER HE SAID HIS PARTY WOULD WELCOME ELECTIONS PROVIDED THEY WOULD NOT SPARK NEW DISTRUBANCES AND BLOODSHED.

4. UNITED DEMOCRATIC PARTY (UDP) SPEAKER, MR. CHARLES MOFELI, MADE MOST DRAMATIC PRESENTATION IN WHICH HE CONDEMNED ANEW EXILED OPPOSITION LEADER, NTSU MOKHEHLE, FOR HAVING REFUSED TO PARTICIPATE IN INTERIM NATIONAL ASSEMBLY AND PRAISED PRIMIN FOR HIS EFFORTS AT RECONCILIATION OF OPPOSING FACTIONS. MOFELI IS CONFIDENTIAL

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REGARDED AS BEING CLOSE TO BNP AND HIS COMMENTS EVOKED SOME VIGOROUS APPLAUSE FROM GOVERNMENT BENCHES. THERE ARE ONLY TWO UDP MEMBERS IN THE ASSEMBLY.

5. MAREMATLOU FREEDOM PARTY (ROYALIST PARTY) MEMBER, MR. EDWIN LEANYA, SPOKE NEXT AND ARGUED THAT ELECTIONS WOULD HAVE TO AWAIT THE RETURN OF THE ODL SPIRIT OF NATIONAL FOREBEARANCE AND PUBLIC DISCIPLINE. ELECTIONS AMIDST THE PREVAILING FEELING OF RANCOR AND BITTERNESS STEMMING FROM THE TROUBLED PERIOD OF THE EARLY SEVENTIES COULD ONLY LEAD TO RENSWED INSTABILITY AND DISTURBANCES.

6. DAVID MASUPHA SEEISO, CHIEF OF MATSIENG AND YOUNGEST BROTHER OF THE KING, SPOKE FOR THE CHIEFS (22 PRINCIPAL AND WARD CHIEFS HOLD EATS ES-OFFICIO IN PARLIAMENT) HE SAID, IN EFFECT, THAT THERE HAD BEEN NO CALL FOR ELECTIONS FROM HIS PEOPLE IN MATSIENG AND CALLED FOR RESTORATION OF ATMOSPHERE OF GOODWILL AND BROTHERHOOD AMONG BASOTHO BEFORE ELECTIONS ARE HELD. (CHIEF MASUPHA IS EXPECTED TO VISIT THE UNITED STATES THIS YEAR UNDER THE INTERNATIONAL VISITORS PROGRAM). END UNCLASSIFIED.

7. BEGIN CONFIDENTIAL. COMMENT: NOTEWORTHY WAS ABSENCE OF ANY PLEA FOR ELECTIONS NOW. BCP APPEARS TO FEEL IT HAS MORE TO GAIN

BY PUSHING THE CAUSE OF RECONCILIATION IN THE HOPE THAT THE
SSLF-EXILED PARTY LEADERSHIP MAY BE ENABLED TO RETURN HOME BEFORE
ELECTIONS ARE HELD. TRADITIONALISTS (MFP AND CHIEFS) FEAR RENEWED
OUTBREAK OF VIOLENCE AS WELL AS POSSIBLE VICTORY OF BCP RADICALS
AND SEEM SATISFIED WITH THEIR PRESENT LOT. TINY UDP WOULDN
PROBABLY NOT BE ABOE TO WIN A SEAT IN AN ELECTED PARLIAMENTARY
BODY AND HAS NO REASON TO SEEK ELECTIONS. GOVERNMENT (BNP), OF
COURSE , IS IN THE SADDLE AND NOT INCLINED TO LAUNCH EURLY
ELECTIONS UNLESS ASSURED IT CAN WIN AT THE POLLS. ALL PARTIES,
FOR THEIR OWN REASONS, SEEM TO PREFER CONTINUATION OF STATUS QUO
RATHER THAN RISKING LOSS OF THEIR PRESENH POSITIONS AND/OR A NEW
PERIOD OF TROUBLES. EVEN AMONG THE YOUNG CIVIL SERVANTS MANY
OF WHOM, IN PRINCIPLE, FAVOR EARLY ELECTIONS, THERE IS UNDERLYING
CONCERN THAT RETURN TO THE POLLS MIGHT BE ACCOMPANIED BY A NEW
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AND TRAGIC OUTBREAK OF VIOLENCE. UNFORTUNATELY, IN LESOTHO
ELECTIONS ARE IDENTIFIED WITH AN EXTENDED PERIOD OF BLOODY
TURMOIL AND, IN REACTION, MANY PEOPLE CLING TO EXISTING STABILITY
FEARFUL OF TROUBLES ELECTIONS MIGHT BRING.

PRIMIN TOLD THE AMBASSADOR RECENTLY "ELECTIONS ARE IN MY PLAN
FOR THIS YEAR" BUT WE BELIEVE THIS SHOULD BE READ TO MSAN THAT
AMONG HIS PLANS FOR THIS YEAR ARE PUBLIC SOUNDINGS AND
FISCUSSIONS OF ELECTIONS AS A FUTURE RPOSPECT. MEANWHILE, THE
PRIMIN SEEMS TO HAVE LAUNCHED A CAMPAIGN (REFTTEL) TO WIDEN THE
BASE OF HIS SUPPORT BY HOLDING A SERIES OF MEETINGS IN OPPOSITION
TERRITORY IN THE SOUTH. FOLLOWING UP TO HIS CECENT SWING THROUGH
QUTHING AND QACHAS NEK DISTRICTS, THE PRIMIN IS THIS WEEK
CAMPAIGNING IN THE SOUTHERN TOWN OF MOHALES HOEK. SOME
OBSERVERS CONCLUDE THWT THE PRIMIN IS TRYING TO IMPROVE BNP
ELECTION CHANCES FOR AN EVENTUAL CONTEST AT THE POLLS. END COMMENT.
END CONFIDENTIAL;
STOKES

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